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ABSTRACT

From April 1990 through September 1991, the Rural Workplace Literacy Project (RWLP) provided migrant and seasonal farm workers from 15 agricultural worksites in California with literacy training. The training, designed to develop reading and job skills, involved 282 enrolled farm workers and 109 nonenrolled class attendants. Of the 13 classes conducted onsite, the average length of instruction was 135 hours. RWLP created successful partnerships with 12 agribusiness employers in addition to the original partners named in the project proposal. Of the students who participated in both pre- and post-testing, 96 percent demonstrated improvement in test scores. RWLP had three employers who contributed paid release time for participants in the program. Employer participation in the program totaled 38 percent in matching funds ($106,318) to the contract funds. In addition, 18 on-the-job training programs were secured to program participants. Recommendations from an independent program evaluation include: (1) comprehensive feedback loop with/to employers regarding program objectives and results; (2) fully using individual educational plans with the learner for managing progress and using class sessions for updates; (3) more materials for multiple levels of students; and (4) regularly-scheduled and mandatory teacher training. RWLP is currently conducting a follow-up survey on program participants regarding job retention, increased earnings, career advancement, and continued education. (LP)

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RURAL WORKPLACE LITERACY PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

-NORTHERN CALIFORNIA-

PERIOD ENDING: SEPTEMBER 30, 1991

CONTRACT NUMBER: V 198 A 00139

Penelope Gallagher

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RC 018461

U. S. Department of Education
Grant No.: V 198 A 00139
Final Report
November 27, 1991

This is the Final Report for the Rural Workplace Literacy Project (RWLP) which began on April 1, 1990 and concluded on September 30, 1991. This report summarizes the program's activities and accomplishments providing migrant and seasonal farmworkers with onsite workplace literacy training designed to enhance their ability to develop their job skills.

Accomplishments

The Rural Workplace Literacy Project (RWLP) has met its goal by providing literacy classes at 15 agricultural worksites, enrolling 282 farmworkers (118% of Plan). An additional 109 farmworkers attended classes and received literacy instruction, but were not enrolled because they did not complete the assessment and orientation period.

RWLP conducted thirteen of the fifteen classes at the worksite. The average number of hours of instruction offered was 135 hours. Class instruction ranged from a low of 82 hours to a high of 186 hours of instruction.

RWLP created successful partnerships with 12 agribusiness employers in addition to the original partners named in the project proposal.

Of the students who participated in both pre and post testing, 96% demonstrated improvement on the CASAS test scores.

RWLP is currently conducting a follow-up survey, tracking continued job retention, increased earnings and career advancement. Initial responses are very positive.

Variations in Actual vs. Proposed Objectives

When building a house, most of the mistakes are made in the blueprint. This analogy can easily be applied to our RWLP proposal. Actual implementation of the RWLP proposal called for minor "structural" revisions to achieve our contract goals. An example of one of those revisions was the elimination of distinct program cycles.

Cycles of Activity

The original plan proposed 3 separate and distinct cycles, each with quantifiable goals and outcomes. Upon receipt of funding, RWLP staff contacted initial partners. The partner's unanimous response was that April was not an optimal time to begin classes. Due to the seasonal nature of agricultural, it was difficult to parallel the high and

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low employment periods because it varied with each partner making distinct cycles impossible.

For example, for vineyards, early spring represents a time after pruning ends and before leaf thinning begins. Several of our partners were vineyards and at this time they were operating with skeleton crews. They do not expect a major influx of workers until the end of April and at that time employees are working long hours doing thinning. During these peak agricultural periods farmworkers were working such long hours that attending literacy classes after work would have been a hardship.

Consequently, RWLP revised the three 6 month cycles in favor of a more accommodating time frame to each agricultural industry served. Several growers stated that May or January start dates would serve the maximum number of participants without running into harvest schedules. All subsequent reporting shows a panorama of activity, rather than clear cyclical activity.

Overview of Instruction

The first class began on April 23, 1990 and the final class completed on September 30, 1991--the last day of the grant. Our RWLP staff provided a total of 2169 hours of actual instruction. The majority of classes were opened and participants enrolled between December 1990 and May of 1991. Three classes requested up to a month break during peak work times. Vineyard managers, or supervisors requested the hiatus in advance with specific dates to resume instruction. In these instances, RWLP staff observed no significant drop in attendance, with most participants commenting that they had missed attending class in the interim.

Scheduling Factors

Due to the nature of agricultural pay customs, workers are not paid on days when it rains and consequently do not report to work or receive paid release time to attend class. In addition, workers worked when their was work and did not work when the work was completed. As a result, classes became precariously dependent upon the weather and the nature of each partners agricultural activities. Classes were extended past projected end dates and scheduling of testing and other planned events were frequently disrupted. This proved to be an unexpected and unavoidable element in the program. Although California has just completed its 5th year of drought conditions, March of 1991 was a month of solid rain, and in some areas snow, which delayed several classes.

Acts of Nature

During the contract period of April 1990 to September 1991--California agriculture has experienced weather conditions of devastating proportion. Many employers, and potential

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partners were unwilling to initiate classes as a result of the continued drought having seriously diminished both crop and profits. Regardless of the equation of education and increased productivity, agricultural employers were less willing to commit to participating financially in onsite classes. This situation predated the Freeze of 1990-1991. The Freeze compounded agriculture's problems in what amounted to cataclysmic proportions. With no crops to pick, California was flooded with tens of thousands of displaced, hungry and homeless agricultural workers.

Nevertheless, in the face of these conditions RWLP was able to reach our goal of 15 classes and exceed our planned number of students served. Never, however, had the climate been less conducive to employer participation.

Employer Participation

RWLP had 3 employers who contributed paid release time for participants in the program. Understandably, these 3 sites ranked among the most definitive in results. Employers provided a variety of support, including classroom space, administrative services, office space and access to equipment, supervisorial support, paid release time and attendance bonuses. Employer participation in the program totaled 38% in matching funds ($106,318) to the RWLP contract funds.

Class Recruitment

Initial contact to recruit employers was made by field staff from the Migrant 402 program, followed by an interview with the Program Planner. When the field staff and Program Planner identified a class site, the Project Coordinator met with the employer to start the class. The lack of continuity with one person in describing the objective and responsibilities of becoming a partner in the project, resulted in varying levels of commitment and understanding. In the future, the person making the initial contact, should be involved throughout the duration of the project.

An employer contract was developed to delineate the employers specific commitments regarding incentives or other forms of participation and support for the program. Some employers tended to take a "wait and see" posture putting responsibility for the program success back in the hands of the workers. They stated they wanted to see how serious the workers were about the program before they decided on an incentive plan. In these situations, no plan ever materialized, in spite of subsequent meetings with Project Coordinator to try and secure them. Also, although work related curriculum was emphasized, employers by and large did not play an active roll in contributing to curriculum, even when invited and encouraged to do so.

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Strategies for Future RWLP Activity

Development of future worksite class will begin with specific endorsements from previous employers. Targeted worksite employers will be introduced to a written agreement designed to promote a more pro-active employer. Educating employers to the expanded benefits of an onsite workplace literacy project would be the foremost strategy for securing committed partners for RWLP in the future. The equation of literacy equals productivity is one that many employers are skeptical of. Evidence of the positive influence of worksite literacy programs can spark enthusiasm in employers where pessimism has existed before. Results we have documented either anecdotally or statistically include the following:

- self-esteem gains for individuals
- greater safety awareness/more hazards reported
- reduced workers compensation claims by participants
- more universally understood communication
- initiating social responsibility
  a. students voluntarily reducing alcohol consumption
  b. students instituting recycling programs
- increased ability to conduct personal business away from the job
- better work attendance

RWLP staff maintain that more attention must be focused on merging program objectives with industry goals in order to secure optimum support from the employer. All this must be accomplished without losing sight of worker input and areas of interest regarding curriculum. Negotiations for incentives and employer support should be conducted in a businesslike manner, with commitments made in writing well in advance of the class start date.

Curriculum

Curriculum was based on a core curriculum for agriculture provided by the RWLP Project Coordinator. The curriculum blended several methodologies including a whole language approach, natural approach, cooperative learning components and phonetic structuring. Each student built a notebook based on Paulo Freire's problem posing techniques. Due to the remote locations where classes were conducted, RWLP staff screened instructors for hiring, in part, on the basis of their ability to deliver the training independently, with little institutionalized support. Although materials were universally distributed throughout the program, teaching styles varied greatly. In addition, each site required alterations in work related curriculum due to differences in types of crops, methods of vineyard/crop management, variations in climate, etc. Ultimately curriculum varied more widely than initially anticipated and supervision was challenging with existing staff. Project Coordinator visited each site to observe class instruction once a month, and some classes with much greater frequency.

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Assessment/Testing

Initial assessment of literacy skills was conducted by the instructor through oral interview and filling out both student application/contract and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) forms. Based on this skills assessment, RWLP instructors administered A, B or C levels of the CASAS Adult Life Skills or Employability Series in the 3 competencies of listening, reading comprehension and math to students.

The initial contract proposal called for a project developed test, but staff opted to use existing CASAS tests because they are recognized and standardized instruments. The CASAS instruments proved to be a logistical problem in that testing required 3 separate class sessions to complete, and many students were absent for one or more of the scheduled testing dates. In addition, a significant number of students at the low end of the literacy skill level were intimidated by testing and did not return to class after being tested.

In the case of post testing, many students with good attendance in classes, in some instances having attended more than 100 hours of instruction, were laid off before post testing was administered. Seasonal agricultural workers traditionally return to Mexico during layoffs, or move on to other farms, making it impossible to complete testing. In many instances, employees had only one day's notice before being laid off. As a result, no advance planning could be done by the instructor. During the contract period, and in anticipation of future literacy grants, CHDC staff has begun negotiations with CASAS to create one instrument specifically for farmworkers, using a menu of relevant items appropriate to their work environment which includes all three competencies in a 90 minute time frame.

Job Upgrades

To date 26 OJT's have been secured to program participants. The weather factors previously described contributed profoundly to the discrepancy in actual vs. planned job upgrades. Migrant 402 staff are currently working to develop upgrade OJTs for clients who completed literacy training in the last 3 months.

Follow-up Survey

RWLP is currently conducting a follow up survey on program participants regarding job retention, increased earnings, career advancement and continued education. Any significant findings will be reported the ERIC Clearinghouse and DOE, following compilation.

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Support Services

Although students were interviewed with regard to their need for support services, a minimum of services were requested or given. This appears to be a result of the instructors not having been well informed about the channels to be used in requesting services. No cases have been found, however, of participants requesting services that were not provided. One site did receive ongoing services in the form of child care. Special attention will be given to insure that this resource will not go untapped in the future, highlighting this asset in teacher orientation.

Employer Follow-up

To better serve agricultural employers/employees needs in the future, we have developed a follow-up survey to obtain suggestions, comments and other data from employers. Any significant findings will be forwarded to DOE and ERIC Clearinghouse after compilation and analysis.

Independent Evaluation

Negotiations and parameters for independent evaluation were completed by February 1991. Evaluators agreed to visit 6 sites twice each. Subsequently, the evaluators decided that one visit per site was sufficient. RWLP staff maintain that the findings, based on one site visit, do not allow for maturation of attitude, or due process on the part of the instructors, students or employers. As the tenor of the evaluation is positive, we do not object strongly to any of its findings, however, the evaluation does not reflect the evolution of the program, or individual site classes as it was, in part, designed to do.

Specifically, progressive outcomes may have been more extensive and varied then stated in the evaluation. Secondly, several employers who may not have initially understood the benefits of the literacy program, were prepared by the completion of the program to acknowledge unexpected positive outcomes, directly or indirectly resulting from the literacy class.

Third, content appeared to vary greatly, but at closer investigation, what varied was the order and style of presentation and not curriculum as a whole. Finally, instructors requests for more support were legitimate, but support increased at each site as communications were effectively established.

Recommendations from the evaluation under review to increase effectiveness of a workplace literacy project include:

- More comprehensive feedback loop with/to employers--regarding objectives and results.
- Using IEP more fully with the learner managing the progress and using class sessions for updates.

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* More materials for multiple levels of students.
* Regularly scheduled and mandatory teacher trainings.

In addition to these recommendations, RWLP would benefit significantly by implementing a student self assessment with lessons on personal goal setting to enable them to more fully engage in the process of their education. This would take place in the initial stages of the program and be updated periodically.

To increase the number of target language speakers per student in class by inviting tutors, volunteers and community members would promote interaction with various native speakers to offset fear and inhibition in conversation.

To conduct a pilot class to define and produce replicable curriculum that teachers feel confident with, and which delivers desired results for increased standards of literacy.

To replace testing with a project specific instrument that is psychometrically accurate for scoring gains in literacy.

In conclusion, an overriding strength of the program has been the strong positive response to the program by workers and employers alike, which has created widespread interest in literacy training in an industry not historically known for extending benefits to its ranks.

All forms utilized in this project have been attached for reference.

In compiling a report on the Rural Workplace Literacy Project the need for brevity precludes us from recounting the stories of the many individuals who benefitted from the program. However, to personalize the experience, and offer some detail we have included the following story about a program participant.

As representation of the many instances of increased self-esteem with both direct and indirect effect on productivity and improved quality of life we offer the case of Francisco Negrete. Francisco is 26 years old, a native of Michoacan, Mexico with 7 years of education in his native country. He came to California at the age of 18 and began immediately working in the fields. Francisco lives with his girlfriend, a woman of Mexican heritage and a native speaker of English and their 3 year old daughter. His only previous contact with education in the U.S. was an ESL class held at his worksite in 1989 through SLIAG funding, which he attended sporadically. Francisco felt a sense of lost opportunity when that class ended.

In December of 1990, Francisco enrolled in the Rural Workplace Literacy Project at Clos du Bois Wines in Healdsburg, California, where he was a crew supervisor,

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overseeing 12 workers. Francisco successfully completed the program with 123 hours of instruction in June of 1991, the highest attendance in the class.

During the spring of 1991, the Vineyard Manager, Steve Smit reported to the instructor that Francisco had begun speaking over the radio to him on the job in English. This seemed to be a turning point for Francisco who had previously stated his reluctance to speak English in front of his boss for fear of being made fun of. Conversely, the Vineyard Manager, raised in South America, made it easy for Francisco to continue to converse in his native language. However, the assertion of Francisco in using his English, prompted the realization by Steve Smit that Francisco could be entrusted with other responsibilities, as he was not only a trusted worker, but was demonstrating his ability to communicate with other English speaking staff and members at large of the agricultural community.

Francisco is now titled an "Irrigation Specialist". He has a house on a neighboring ranch cultivated by Clos du Bois and is directly responsible for the irrigation of 650 acres of grapes.

This would seem to meet our criteria for success quite sufficiently for the Rural Workplace Literacy Project, but another unexpected result surfaced and was acknowledged by Francisco himself. During the summer of 1991, Francisco married his girlfriend, the mother of their daughter. As previously mentioned, Francisco's wife, although she learned Spanish in her home as a second generation Hispanic women, was a native speaker of English. Francisco, frustrated by his limited English, only spoke Spanish in the home. This created some tensions as he desired to conduct business as the head of the household, but deferred to his girlfriend for all contact with the community where English was required. Francisco's new freedom to express himself in English has allowed him to assume the role he is most comfortable with in managing the family's business affairs and is able to stay linguistically one step ahead of his 3 year old daughter, he jokes. The impact of Francisco's expanded job responsibilities, and increased ability to communicate in and outside of his primary relationship has clearly demonstrated his enhanced self esteem and quality of life.

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